

Message Text

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SUBJ: BIOGRAPHIC NOTES ON STATE SECRETARY FOR DEFENSE STEMERDINK

SUMMARY: STATE SECRETARY FOR DEFENSE (MATERIEL) ABRAHAM STEMERDINK, WHO WILL BE VISITING US FOR FIRST TIME DECEMBER 8-14, IS AN ARDENT SOCIALIST ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS BUT AN EQUALLY STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF NATO AND THE NETHERLANDS' COMMITMENT TO IT. WHILE HE IS RELATIVELY FREE OF THE EMOTIONAL HANG-UPS ABOUT THE DUTCH MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT WHICH ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS BOSS, DEFENSE MINISTER VREDELING, HE IS CONVINCED THAT IT IS FAR FROM A PERFECT ORGANIZATION AND IS INTENT ON IMPROVING AND STREAMLINING IT. HE HAS A PROFESSIONAL RESPECT FOR US MILITARY STRENGTH, AND IS A PROTAGONIST FOR REALLOCATION OF THE ALLIANCE'S DEFENSE TASKS THROUGH SPECIALIZATPON. END SUMMARY.

1. STEMERDINK IS PROUD OF HIS SOCIALIST CREDENTIALS BUT ALSO OF HAVING BEEN A CAREER OFFICER IN THE DUTCH ARMY (HE LOST AN EYE IN TRAINING ACCIDENT, REPORTEDLY WHEN HE THREW HIMSELF ON A HAND GRENADE TO PROTECT AN ENLISTED MAN STANDING WITH HIM). LIKE HIS LABOR PARTY COLLEAGUES, HE BELIEVES THAT EVER-INCREASING DEFENSE COSTS AND THE GROWING

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NEED FOR GOVERNMENT FUNDS IN NON-DEFENSE SECTORS DICTATE A

RATIONALIZATION OF THE NETHERLANDS' DEFENSE EFFORTS. UNLIKE THE FAR LEFT OF HIS PARTY, HOWEVER, HE DOES NOT CHALLENGE THE CONTINUING NEED FOR A SUBSTANTIAL DEFENSE PROGRAM OR THE NETHERLANDS' CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO NATO. HE DOES SEEK MAXIMUM VALUE FOR THE DEFENSE BUDGET AND BELIEVES THIS CAN BEST BE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH SPECIALIZATION IN THE REALLOCATION OF NATO TASKS.

2. AN ADMIRER OF US MILITARY HARDWARE AND EXPERTISE, STEMERDINK HAS CONSISTENTLY EXPRESSED HIS PREFERENCE FOR AN AMERICAN AIRCRAFT TO REPLACE THE RNLAFF'S F-104S. HE HAS STUCK TO THIS LINE DESPITE CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM ELEMENTS OF THE DUTCH LEFT FOR THE PROCUREMENT OF A LESS SOPHISTICATED AND COSTLY AIRCRAFT THAN THE REPLACEMENT CANDIDATES PRESENTLY BEING CONSIDERED BY THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM. HE IS LIKEWISE PREPARED TO DEFY LEFT-WING, PACIFIST-SOCIALIST ARGUMENTS THAT NO REPLACEMENT AT ALL SHOULD BE PROCURED.

3. STEMERKINK WIELDS MORE INFLUENCE IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY THAN WOULD BE ASSUMED FROM HIS RELATIVE YOUTH (AGE 38) AND POSITION AS ONE OF TWO STATE SECRETARIES UNDER MOD VREDELING. THIS IS BECAUSE OF HIS PROFESSIONAL MILITARY COMPETENCE (IN CONTRAST TO VREDELING) AND THE INFLUENCE HE WIELDS WITH MEMBERS OF THE LABOR PARTY (THE DOMINANT PARTY IN THE PRESENT COALITION GOVERNMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, THE RECENTLY APPROVED LONG-TERM DEFENSE WHITE PAPER WAS BASICALLY HIS BRAINCHILD.

4. BY NATURE STEMERDINK IS UNPRETENTIOUS, SOFT-SPOKEN AND NON-FLAMBOYANT. YET HE IS NOT IN THE LEAST RETICENT ABOUT ESPOUSING STRONG VIEWS, BASED, IT SOMETIMES APPEARS, ON RATHER SIMPLISTIC AND UNSOPHISTICATED JUDGMENTS. HE IS A PRAGMATIST AND A TIRELESS WORKER, WITH SIMPLE TASTES AND A SEEMINGLY UNCOMPLICATED APPROACH TO LIFE. HE IS DEVOTED TO HIS WIFE AND YOUNG SON. HE SPEAKS AND UNDERSTANDS ENGLISH RATHER WELL, AND FOLLOWS THE AMERICAN SCENE WITH INTEREST. STEMERDINK HAS BEEN

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MOST FRIENDLY AND FORTHCOMING IN HIS DEALINGS WITH THE EMBASSY, IN PARTICULAR WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND DCM.

5. STEMERDINK HAS NEVER REFLECTED ANY PHILOSOPHIC PROBLEMS WITH THE US AS A NATION. ON THE CONTRARY, WE WOULD JUDGE THAT HIS ORIENTATION IS POSITIVE, AS EVIDENCED INTER ALIA BY HIS IMMEDIATE INTEREST IN THE

PROSPECT OF A VISIT TO THE US AS FIRST SUGGESTED TO HIM BY THE EMBASSY MORE THAN A YEAR AGO. AT THE SAME TIME, STEMERDINK HAS BEEN QUITE VOLUBLE IN HIS CRITICISM TO EMBASSY OFFICERS OF WHAT HE CONSIDERS THE UNFORTUANTE PROPENSITY OF THE USG FOR AIDING AND ABETTING RIGHT-WING DICTATORIAL REGIMES. NOT ONLY IS THIS BAD FROM THE MORAL POINT OF VIEW, IN HIS JUDGMENT, BUT HE ARGUES THAT THE US HAS HURT ITS OWN LONGER-TERM INTERESTS BY CONNIVING WITH THE LIKES OF PAPADAPPOULOUS, CAETANO AND, TODAY, PINOCHET. HE IS NOT TOO IMPRESSED BY THE ARGUMENT THAT THE US, AS THE LEADER OF THE WESTERN ALLIANCE, HAS IMPORTANT SECURITY INTERESTS WHICH REQUIRE IT TO MAINTAIN A MINIMUM WORKING RELATIONSHIP EVEN WITH REGIMES WHICH IT DISAPPROVES OF. RATHER, HE BELIEVES THAT THE US SHOULD AND COULD TAKE A LEAF FROM THE SOCIALIST BOOK BY FOLLOWING A POLICY OF PUBLIC CONDEMNATION AND OSTRACISM. IN THIS HE THINKS AND TALKS LIKE MANY OF HIS COMPATRIOTS WHO CANNOT RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO PUT THE US THROUGH A KIND OF DUTCH REFORM SCHOOL. THESE IDEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS, HOWEVER, DO NOT OUTWEIGHT HIS PRAGMATIC JUDGMENT THAT A STRONG NATO AND CLOSE US-DUTCH RELATIONS CONTINUE TO BE INDISPENSABLE FOR THE SECURITY AND WELL-BEING OF THE NETHERLANDS.

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